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THE SCANDINAVIAN-AMERICAN: HIS STATUS.

BY HROLF WISBY.

HIS desirability is absolutely unquestioned; it is not even being investigated like that of some other peoples who emigrate here. We like him because he comes here to live and to settle down, not to hoard his savings and spend them in his native land. He likes us in return because we give him a fair chance to prove his mettle in laying new soil under the plow, in conquering the wilderness, and that is the spirit of the old-time Viking in the present-day pioneer. Really and truly, that is what it is, and I am tempted very much to say that that is *all* it is. Would he but stay at home and there toil with the solid enterprise by which he is known here, he would be certain of a home success comparable to that which he achieves here. But he will not do that. He cannot be made to work very strenuously at home; he is rather indifferent, if not lazy; he does not seem to discern his opportunity, obvious though it usually is; and he had rather sit up nights gloating over an exaggerated advertisement of his probable chance in the Far West than realize the possibilities at his threshold.

And so it happens that the same ancient love for adventure over the seas that brought Leif here as discoverer is drawing his people here as settlers. Whether Dane, Norwegian or Swede, his good moral character, his honest way of doing things, and his home-loving instincts are so pronounced that they may be said to be taken for granted. These are the very qualities that make him a desirable immigrant, perhaps the most desirable we have.

Consider the case of a Norwegian farmer in the Dovre region. By slow, plodding work and frugal, though wholesome, living he is barely able to live within his means. He may have quite a handsome profit in a good season, to be sure, but there are certain

to follow poor seasons that will take the cream off the pitcher. Of profit, as such, there is none worth mentioning. There is a stream running through the property. Before it slips away over his neighbor's boundary it breaks into a very beautiful—and valuable—waterfall. A Scotch laird comes along and offers him fifty pounds sterling for the fishing privilege. The farmer has three growing lads and a girl, and so why shouldn't he let the strange gentleman fish his salmon for pay?—he would let him fish free, anyhow. 'This is his first "windfall," the first money he has not worked for, and it is spent bringing up the children, who become restless and finally emigrate. The laird in the course of time fails to put in an appearance. The old man and the old woman sit there on the farm without good cheer and company, and the property is falling into neglect. The old man offers to sell out to his neighbor, but his neighbor cannot spare the cash. A German commercial traveller learns of the situation. He buys the fishing rights for the season, and other Germans come there to "fish," but they don't catch anything—not fish. The old man was willing to take 10,000 kroner from his neighbor, that is, only little cash, at first, and small yearly instalments. The Germans put 6,000 kroner in gold on the table, and the farm, which they don't care about, and the waterfall, which they intend as motive power for a wood-pulp mill, is theirs. Old Norway loses a good family, for the parents join the children here; Germany adds to her industrial conquest; and the United States gets just the kind of help she most desires.

It would never have occurred to the old man to buy up the fishing rights of the entire stream from its source to the sea, and thus establish, with the waterfall as a nucleus for power, a salmon cannery on his own property. It would have been still further from his pastoral mind to invite the local bank to finance, also with the waterfall in mind, an electric power and lighting plant, and sell his stock to the corporation. Such and similar are the opportunities which Norwegian property-owners permit to go, at a fractional percentage of their real value, into the hands of German and English capitalists. In other words, the owners leave a fortune at their doorstep, and often without realizing the fact, to face the hardships of the settler here. Somehow, America seems to have an exhilarating effect on these people, for here they acquire initiative to realize their opportunities.

Take the instance of a Swedish farm-hand who is earning very likely only 150 kroner a year above his board and bed, or a servant-girl in a Swedish town who may be getting still less than that. Even with the utmost economy, they could not possibly save more than twenty-five dollars a year each; so, by saving alone, there could be no future for them beyond servitude. They come here simply because the wages are higher, and because the chances of becoming independent seem to them more attractive than at home. There is a dash of the Viking in these simple souls, too, quite enough to deceive them as to the prospects that surround them.

In Denmark, where the wealth is more evenly distributed than anywhere else, the peasants that own land very seldom emigrate, because, unlike their Scandinavian kinsmen, they have understood how to consolidate their interests, and what one man could never have done for himself single-handed, the cooperation of thousands, similarly situated, enables him to do with signal success. The scheme of cooperation in buying and selling, in tilling, harvesting and exporting, extends over all Denmark. The managers are experts, the leaders are authorities. But the Danish farm-hands and artisans do emigrate; and occasionally a dairy expert finds his way over here.

Strange to relate, however, whatever specialized experience the skilled Scandinavian may absorb here he is very seldom found to utilize for enterprise on native soil. One would think a Swedish toy-carver, after observing the amazing demand in this country for German-made toys, would feel tempted to go home to promote the export of Swedish-made toys here. The Swedish carvers are quite as clever, if not more artistic than the Nuremberg colony in Germany; and, after the completion of original models suited to the American taste, the problem would be merely that of creating a demand here. The Swedes have everything in their favor: cheaper water-power, cheaper wood material, and practically direct steamship connection with America. I could mention at random a dozen different very plausible and practical projects of this kind that *might* be but *are* not, because the Scandinavians we get are too busy or short-sighted to discern them, and the Scandinavians we do not get have not the experience required to carry out such projects.

America monopolizes the brain and the body of the Scandinavian-American to a greater extent, possibly, than those of any

other race. Once she gets him she has reason to feel pretty sure of him. The trouble is she can't get enough of him. The most liberal estimate for 1906 places the total Scandinavian population here at only 1,200,000. Not until the very early eighties did the figures approach the half-million mark; in 1890 they were 920,000, and in 1900 they had reached 1,050,000.

At the present rate of increase we shall have to wait till 1921 before we have a good round million and a half Scandinavian immigrants here.

Little though the band be, it has managed to centre its efforts in certain rural districts so as to make itself quite conspicuous. In Minnesota, there are no less than 225,000 Scandinavians; in Illinois, 115,000; and in Wisconsin, 100,000. When considered in relation to the foreign-born population here, the Scandinavians show up surprisingly well in not a few States. In Minnesota, 45.5 per cent. of all foreigners are Scandinavians; in both North and South Dakota, 37 per cent.; and in Utah the percentage is 35. The first State below the one-third percentage figure is Washington, with 25 per cent., then Alaska and Idaho, with 23 per cent. each, and Iowa and Nebraska with 22 per cent. each. On the other hand, Wisconsin, which counts so high in the aggregate acquisition of Scandinavians, has only 20 per cent., and Illinois, which counts still higher, has but 15 Scandinavians for each 100 foreigners. An Eastern State like Connecticut, which we may safely regard as a geographical counterpart of Norway, shows only 10 per cent., and the States of New York and New Jersey count the Scandinavians as 5 per cent. of all aliens.

These numbers go to prove that the Scandinavians prefer the very regions where we would best like to have not only them as settlers but the main current of our entire immigration. They are fewest in the big cities, quite frequent in the smaller cities and towns, and in characteristic evidence in the country, where the soil claims them by preference to almost any other race. Chicago is the most typically Scandinavian of the big cities, with 45,836 Swedes, 22,011 Norwegians, and 10,166 Danes; or a total Scandinavian population of only about 78,000. New York follows, with 28,320 Swedes; 11,387 Norwegians; and 5,621 Danes; a total of 45,328. Boston has 5,541 Swedes, but only 1,145 Norwegians, and a handful of 675 Danes. These figures tell the story.

A very significant situation appears when we look up the status of the Scandinavian-American by what statisticians call "principal occupation." Though the arable land in Norway doesn't amount to more than three per cent. in acreage, or little more than a Russian Grand Duke would consider a suitable hunting-preserve, the Norsemen who come here take to land-tilling to a greater extent than either the Danes or the Swedes. Classed as farmers, planters, overseers, etc., the Norwegians represent 28 per cent. of their total number in the United States, while the Danes take second place with 23 per cent., and the Swedes third place with 16 per cent. As agricultural laborers, the Norwegians, again, lead with 17 hands out of every 100 of their race, Denmark follows with 13 per cent., and Sweden 10 per cent. But contrast with these numbers that of the vast Italian immigration, which yields only 3 per cent. to agricultural labor, but 30 per cent. to labor in general, and the desirable work of the Scandinavians as tillers of the soil becomes an incontrovertible fact. In the class of servants and waiters, the Swedes lead with 11 per cent., probably owing to the demand for servant-girls; Norway has 8 per cent. and Denmark 6 per cent. in this employment. As general laborers, the Swedes dominate with 10 per cent., followed by the Danes with 8 per cent., and the Norwegians, here for the first time last, with 7.5 per cent. The percentages for all the other occupations engaged in by the Scandinavian-American are trifling. That next in importance is three per cent. for carpenters and joiners—alike for the three nations—and then the percentages begin to drop to fractional numbers. That Norway should supply a much greater percentage of farmers and farm-hands than Sweden, where agriculture stands much higher, and also outstrip Denmark, where agriculture stands probably higher than in any other land, is a surprise, but not a pleasant one, to the Norwegian Government. The latter has in many ways tried to remedy the condition, which, of course, is inimical to the welfare of the country; but so far nothing has availed to stop the very class of labor Norway least of all can afford to dispense with—the tillers of the soil—from emigrating here. Indirectly, however, Norway profits, somewhat after the manner of an old-age pensioner, by the money help which the young people here send home regularly to the old folks. The money-letter (*Pengebrevet*) from America is anxiously awaited every month in thousands of Norwegian homes, and there

are minor settlements and hamlets that are almost entirely dependent upon this aid for a cash income. In Sweden the money-letter has also come to be regarded as a kind of national economic factor, whereas it figures only modestly in Danish life.

This leads me to consider the probable wealth of the Scandinavian-American. Authorities agree in placing his wealth at fifty dollars *per capita*, or a couple of dollars higher than the average in the United States. On this basis, the startling fact is laid bare that the 400,000 Norwegians now in this country possess \$20,000,000, or almost as much ready money as is owned by the 2,240,000 Norwegians in Norway, who have only nine dollars *per capita*, or \$20,160,000! The present total population of the three Scandinavian countries combined is a round ten millions. The average wealth *per capita* is about ten dollars, or a total of one hundred million dollars. The Scandinavians here number, at the most, 1,200,000, and at fifty dollars *per capita* they possess sixty million dollars. In other words, though the Scandinavians here only constitute a little over a ninth part of the Scandinavian peoples, they are five times richer *per capita*, and own in cash money an amount equal to three-fifths of all the money in circulation in Scandinavia.

To appreciate justly the social status of the Scandinavian-American, an understanding of the conditions that produce him in Scandinavia, and those with which he surrounds himself here, is not only desirable but necessary. Socially he loses in standing quite as much by contact with America as he gains financially. We must not forget that he comes from a country where even the humblest and poorest are natural readers by a tradition that dates back to the Saga age. And it is not newspapers and magazines and bargain-counter "literature" that he feeds on, but books that are sound and solid. To be sure, he does not read Kant and Spinoza, nor is he likely to have made the acquaintance of Shelley and Goethe, and it may be seriously doubted if his tastes permit him to indulge in what a literary connoisseur would esteem the quintessence of letters in modern and classic art. Nevertheless, his reading ranges from the Sagas of Snorro Sturluson to the dramas of Ibsen and Björnson, and of foreign literature in translation the works of men like Balzac, Turgenieff, Tolstoy, Hugo and Byron are treasured by him. You are, by the way, quite as likely to find him, weary from the labor in the field, poring over

"Paradise Lost" as over a volume of H. C. Andersen or Auerbach, in the evening when the lights are lit and every cottage in Scandinavia becomes a cheerful mixture of library and work-room for the home handicrafts. There is no saying but what the awkward, tawny-haired lad, who has been pitching hay all day, is absorbing a thorough agricultural education at the agricultural school of the district. The Government of Sweden, for instance, has scattered twenty-six such schools (*Landtbruksskolor*) all over the country, and with excellent results. The grown peasant may look crude enough in his home-made *vadmal*, but there are in Sweden no less than twenty farmer's schools (*Landtmannaskolor*) calculated to give the grown men expert education in farm management, and your innocent-looking Yon Yonson is a pretty diligent attendant. For those who wish to further perfect themselves—and usually the sons of well-to-do farmers are ambitious agronomes—there are two agricultural high-schools (*Landtbruksinstitut*) also under government supervision, the graduation certificate of which stamps the holder as an authority. With these facilities at his command, it is easy to see that the Scandinavian who comes here to work is supplied with something more than brawn and muscle. It is fair to say that he is, in a large measure, quite as much of a brain, as of a body, worker. Leaving aside whatever technical knowledge he may have absorbed by government aid at home, his status as an educated reader and as a seeker after knowledge, who is reaching out in vacant moments for a better grasp on the problems, the mysteries, and the possibilities of life, certainly entitles him to consideration as a mind rather than a machine. In opening up the Great Northwest, James J. Hill surrounded himself with a greater amount of human material grown in Scandinavia than any other American promoter, and while he has always been willing to testify to the innocence of the Scandinavian-American he has never remarked about his ignorance—even though the Swedes mispronounced him "Mester Hell."

Within the last sixty years there has been a sweeping change in the agricultural situation of Scandinavia, and, as it is this change which has brought us so many good workers, let us consider it. Take Sweden as example. The decline in the number of household servants on farms in 1880-90 was no less than 26.4 per cent., from 216,000 to 159,000. The loss of 57,000 such

servants amounts to over eighteen million days of work a year. The earliest figures were taken in 1870, when there were 195 female servants for every 1,000 country homes, as against 129 in 1890. Contrast with this the fact that the net emigration for each 1,000 inhabitants reached its greatest height in 1882, when it was 11.29, and that in the last decade it declined to less than 3.00, and the movement of population is clear. The servants were driven away by the introduction of machine power in farm work and came over here. The typical Swedish farm up to 1850 was a big home that would annually lodge and board and clothe, at the owner's expense, as many servants of both sexes as the enormous kitchen could be made to hold at the *five* daily meals! Poor appetite is not a popular malady in Sweden. Nowadays, there is no board and lodging given to the men; only to the women necessary on the farm. Many employments, such as tending the cattle-stables, which were formerly done by women, are now done by men. Farm labor has been classified and specialized. The *statare*, or tenement laborer, is a married man, who does all the special work on the farm to which he belongs as worker. He even milks the cows, a job formerly in women's hands. He lives apart with his family in a house of his own, and is paid partly in money and partly in grain, milk, seed and the like. Those engaged in this employment have increased since 1825, when there were 9,000 *statares*, to more than 40,000 at present. The *topare*, or crofter, rents for his own use a small lot of land from his employer, paying for the land by rendering a certain number of days' work on the employer's estate. This employment has decreased, owing to the *topare's* finding an outlet for his rapidly growing independence by emigrating here. There were 100,000 *topares* in Sweden in 1850, but only 80,000 in 1900. Still, the crofter system flourishes admirably in some provinces. Most of the crofters that emigrate become farm-owners here. The *dakverksarbetare*, or day-laborer, often has a home of his own, and usually he is married. He is hired generally for short periods to do almost any kind of farm work. His busy time is the harvest season. When he is not working for day wages, he busies himself with some sort of handicraft. He seldom has any support from his children, who seem to prefer to emigrate, and his employment is decreasing.

The result of an investigation of 24,760 cases shows that the

tenement laborer, as the least favored at home, has the most immediate reason for emigration, and the crofter has better cause for resisting this temptation as he is the best favored next to the craftsman, by which, in Sweden, is meant the gardener, blacksmith, steward or foreman on an estate. The investigation also proved that the economic situation in Sweden is fair rather than poor. It is not poverty, but rather love of independence and adventure, that drives the peasant to emigrate. Analogous conditions exist in Denmark and Norway.

We may account for the Scandinavian-American economically and socially; the worth to himself of what he achieves here as an emigrant will always remain a closed book, or at best an abstraction. It is easy enough to account for a man like John Ericsson, who invented the propeller, the fire-engine, the hot-air engine and the monitor. J. A. Dahlgren, inventor of the cannon bearing his name, is in the same class with him. The Swedes have always been great mechanicians, from Nobel, with dynamite and submarine, to the more peaceful Salenius, inventor of the radiator. These men had talents of value to the practical industries of this country, and were needed here, but they would just as likely have gone somewhere else: America was not to them a refuge, a haven. Nor is it difficult to account for a financial specialist like the late General C. T. Christensen, who simply supplied, with service, a demand that was as urgent here as it was lax in Denmark. But when you come to study the status of the Scandinavian-Americans who have grappled with problems that are supposed to be capable of successful solution on native ground only, you will not find a man who stands so high but that you have a pitiful notion that he would have reached a higher place on home soil. Was ever man known to write himself great in a foreign tongue? Hjalmar Hjörth Boyesen, the Norwegian, acquired admirable facility in English, but he occupies no place in American letters, nor, of course, in Norwegian literature. The work of men like him is comparatively wasted. A certain measure of success is possible to such an one, but true greatness never. The man is at home nowhere; nor is his work. Put Ibsen in Boyesen's shoes, and who would guarantee us "Brand"? Had Ibsen come here, he would most likely have been rolling pills to the end, or, considering his financial penchant, he might have had a monopoly. If this contention is wrong, why is it that so many good Scandi-

navian brains have gone to waste here, thinking it is wrong? Why is it that a mind like that of Clemens Petersen, the Danish critic, could not thrive here? Björnson once assured me, in a personal letter, that he considered him a true genius, though but little known, and that he found him to be so rich in inspiration that he had rather "talk with him to the end of all time than with any other man living." Petersen once wielded an even mightier pen in Danish letters than Georg Brandes at present. He was the original discoverer of Ibsen. He worked hard and long. After a struggle of almost four decades against adversity here, he went home to spend the evening of his life in peace. Was he too keen, too critical, too superior in his criticism to suit the American idea of "popular" criticism?

Knut Hamsun, one of Norway's most gifted dramatists, who, by the way, once wrote the most eccentric book on American Mental Life (*"Amerikas Aandsliv"*) I have ever had the patience to read, reached his zenith here as—conductor on a Minneapolis street-car. There are instances galore showing the dispiriting effect of emigration on authorship.

Jacob Riis, the reformer, stands somewhat apart by himself. We have the pronouncement of President Roosevelt that Riis is the "most useful citizen" in New York, but would he not have had a better chance of greatness if he had stayed at home and labored among his own kin?

The American soil out of which he has taken for his needs is dear to the Scandinavian-American, and the house he may have built with his own hands is so, too. He tries his very best to make it a home, and he succeeds after a fashion. But, to a nation that has been supported, especially in its domestic life, by the traditions of centuries of cultural intercourse, the true sense of home is not possible in a foreign land, for traditions belong to the intangible freight that cannot be imported. Mentally, his status is one of comparative disappointment, but economically he is usually proud of whatever success he may have here. Homesickness is his worst malady, but a trip on the "Christmas Ships," which annually take thousands of fur-clad Northmen to the native board for a brief sojourn, has proved to be the best cure. The homesick man soon discovers that he has outgrown the conditions besetting home life. In the second generation there is but a very faint trace of national feeling, and gradually America absorbs

her most willing worker, but also, at the same time, the very one who is slowest to forget his native land.

He does not let go his language, however, and the children born here are made to learn it. He keeps up a certain passive interest in the literature, politics and journalism of his country. The Scandinavian press here is, however, more remarkable for quantity than for quality, and, as a rule, confines itself almost totally to reporting, in a condensed form, the principal news from the old land.

There are numerous clubs and associations among the Scandinavian-Americans, but no attempt has been made to fuse their interests together in a common union. While Dane, Norwegian and Swede are quite able to forget their stupid national differences here, still it would be out of the question to shake them up together like dice in the same box. The Norwegians are clannish. The mountains made them so. They are headstrong and devoid of good manners, like a true peasant folk, though good-hearted enough, to be sure. The Swedes are the politest and most humane people of the North, and prone to resent the strong-hearted Norwegian attitude as an insult to their feelings; hence the trouble that has now been adjusted by Norway's setting up a separate government. The Danes present a sort of happy medium between the extreme polish of the Swedes and the pronounced bluntness of the Norwegians, but they are, on the other hand, altogether too liable to melancholy and indifference.

HROLF WISBY.